

Housing, Finance and Corporate Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee Briefing

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Please find below an update on key areas of activity from the Housing, Regeneration, Business and Economic Development portfolio since the committee last met.

Housing

1. Church Street Renewal

Work on developing the Green Spine continues. Wider consultation on the master planning exercise will take place in November and December through a range of events.

The Regeneration Base at 99 Church Street is operating well and residents drop in regularly to talk to the team.

The Luton Street development is due to be submitted for planning in the New Year and the developer is meeting regularly with the residents' group to consider their input to the design process.

2. Ebury Bridge

Dialogue with residents in the delivery of new and improved homes at Ebury Bridge continues through on-site meetings; drop in sessions and a regular newsletter. The first of the Soho Housing blocks has been acquired; negotiations are well advanced

on the second block, completion is expected within the calendar year and rehousing residents is currently underway.

3. Housing Zone

The Business Impact Analysis for Lisson Arches will be completed by the end of November. Discussions continue on securing further investment in the Housing Zone from the GLA.

4. Tollgate Gardens

Affinity Sutton has taken possession of the Tollgate Gardens site. Hoardings and safe access routes are in place for the residents of Tollgate House and demolition works began in the week of 20th October.

5. Infill programme

To date we have received planning permission for 8 new homes, with a forecast of 16 new homes for this financial year. These are proposed to be delivered within the financial year 2017/18, along with planning permissions for the new build development sites. We are looking at ways of accelerating this programme, and expect it to deliver over 100 units, maximising the delivery of affordable housing on our own land.

6. Affordable Housing

18 new affordable homes have been delivered by housing association partners since April 2016, with a further 175 new affordable homes expected to be delivered by partners during the remainder of 2016/2017. These will be provided on mainly new build s106 sites.

In addition the Council has completed the purchase of 113 two and three bed properties on the open market to provide affordable housing for homeless households. Following completion of works, 88 of these homes are now let or awaiting letting. The Council has agreed terms on a further 22 purchases.

6. Housing and Planning Act 2016

We are still awaiting regulations to implement the key changes brought in by the 2016 Act, such as sale of high value voids and the pay-to-stay provisions. On starter homes, there are indications that ministers are considering broadening the definition so that instead of an exclusive focus on homes for ownership, it also covers rent-to-buy products. The Mayor of London is developing a product of this kind and we are in discussions with the Greater London Authority about this and the potential synergies between it and the Westminster Accelerator that we are delivering in

partnership with Dolphin Living.

7. Homelessness Reduction Bill

The Homelessness Reduction Bill, which is being taken forward as a Private Members' Bill by Bob Blackman MP, is scheduled to have its second reading debate on 28th October. In advance of this Mr Blackman has produced a revised Bill, which takes account of recommendations made by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee's pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill as well as discussions with the Local Government Association and others in the sector. While the Bill continues to place heavy emphasis on preventing homelessness, it no longer proposes an emergency 56 day duty to accommodate anyone with nowhere safe to stay.

Proposals to change the 'local connection' test (from the current requirement to live in the area for 6 of the last 12 months or 3 out of the past 5 years to one for someone to have lived or worked in an area for 6 months without a break, or because of family associations or 'special circumstances') have also been dropped. Communities Secretary Sajid Javid MP announced on 24th October that the Government is officially endorsing the Bill and will be supporting it through the Private Members' Bill process. The Policy and Scrutiny Committee will be kept updated on the Bill's progress.

8. Annual HRA business planning cycle - A robust collaborative business planning process underpinning the indicative investment programme is well underway. It is based upon:

- robust assumptions on key variables
- sound contingency levels for development schemes
- close collaboration and partnership of key officers from all areas of the council and CWH

9. CityWest Homes (CWH)

Performance - CWH continued to perform well in Quarter 2 against its management agreement targets.

Board Recruitment - Two resident board members and an independent member are due to step down this year and recruitment is underway. An excellent response has been received to a letter from the chairman sent to all tenants and resident lessees inviting them to consider board membership with over 50 applications received. One Resident Board member will be appointed to join the board immediately, with a second to join in Spring 2017.

Service Transformation – Work continues on the development of a new service delivery target operating model, supported by a digital programme.

Development of a multichannel contact centre is on track with a call handling pilot work now being rolled out across all areas.

The model includes a review of the current use of the offices. Where customer visitor levels are low and maintaining an office is unsustainable, replacement with other service delivery options, including home visits for vulnerable residents and using other community facilities is being explored.

CWH is working on a joint procurement exercise with the Council to purchase CRM software which the Council aims to pilot in Q4, with the ambition of improving service delivery and giving greater access through direct self-service.

To support the creation of the new target operating model, CWH is working towards creating a new legal subsidiary. The target date for the creation of the new subsidiary is January 2017 with a start date from April 2017.

Letting of new repairs and major works contracts is on track for phased implementation over the spring and summer of 2017.

10. Rough Sleeping

A Rough Sleeping Pathway and Engagement Officer has joined the Rough Sleeping Team at the council. The officer will work in partnership with City West Homes to reduce rough sleeping across the borough and within the estates. They are organising a CWH estate based street count to engage both residents and CWH staff in addressing rough sleeping in their communities. Moving forward, new protocols are being established to report the issue and to support staff to make informal interventions.

We have experienced a significant rise in the number of service users who are using 'Spice'. At present, approximately 35% are using this substance and the impacts we have experienced are cardiac arrests, violence and aggression alongside seizures. A meeting was held recently to establish a consistent point of contact with the police for Hostels, increasing information sharing and creating a joined up approach on 'Spice' usage and dealing. The meeting also established a rough sleeping ASB case worker as a single point of contact for daytime activity around anti-social behaviour. We also established an alert mechanism to ensure both hostels and police are aware of when a bad batch of 'spice' is circulating.

Economic Development and Growth

11. Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)

The Economy Team has entered a busy period of preparation for Heart of London Business Alliance's (HOLBA) renewal ballots for the occupier BIDs covering the areas of Piccadilly, St James's, Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus. Officers across Economy, City Management and Communities, Business Rates, Elections, Legal, and Policy are currently reviewing the HOLBA 2017-22 Business Proposal along with the two inserts which outline the BID Levy Rules and Financial Management. The ballots will be run during February and March 2017 with the results being announced on the 24th March 2017.

12. Westminster Business Unit

The Business Unit continues to progress well since its inception. In excess of 184 enquiries have been handled to date with a resolution rate of 86%. Most common enquiries relate to Business Advice/ Support, Licensing, Business Rates, Investment and Procurement. The unit is currently on track to achieve their annual target of 300 enquiries.

13. Westminster Enterprise Week (WEW) 2016

The final details are being pulled together for Westminster Enterprise Week 2016 which will run from 14th – 20th November. WEW 2016 aims to:

- Work in partnership with around 60 business and enterprise support volunteers to deliver around 30 dedicated enterprise activities, events or workshops
- Provide a total of 1,500 enterprise learning hours to engage and inspire 1,000 young people in enterprise education and connect them to the world class enterprise landscape on their doorstep
- Strengthen ties with important sector clusters in order to help grow and develop local talent

The event programme has been improved further from an already highly successful inaugural year. The programme's capacity offers far in excess of the guided learning hours target for enterprise education/activities.

14. Employment

499 residents have been supported into employment so far this financial year. Of those, 355 were previously long term unemployed, claiming benefits for 12 months or more. Employment Outcomes for long term unemployed residents in 2016/17 are projected to increase by 158% compared with 2015/16. In the 5 year period Feb 2011 to Feb 2016 long term unemployment in Westminster fell by 22%. Compared

to 378 Local Authority districts in England, Wales and Scotland, Westminster achieved the 8th highest fall in the numbers of Long Term Unemployed.

On-going reductions in long term unemployment reflect the Economy Team's shift in focus towards supporting long term unemployed residents. All employment and skills services funded by the Council now prioritise groups further away from work.

15. Broadband

In the last month BT Openreach have announced the upgrade of Moorgate cabinets 7, 8 and 9. This ensures a further 360 residents have access to fibre broadband. To date the total number of premises being served is 4,030. This expansion is part of the BT Openreach commitment to make fibre broadband available to an additional 38,874 homes and businesses in Westminster following a council campaign last year.

The council has also supported new entrants into the market and G.Network has now connected 3 streets in Westminster with fibre broadband which serves up to 138 businesses. They have now identified 82 streets within the City of Westminster which they would like to lay fibre on by December 2017.

16. Markets

The deadline for submitting PQQ's closed on the 30th September. The council received 7 submissions from operators who are interested in managing the market. The evaluation of these submissions is currently taking place with the view of shortlisting operators by Friday 28th October.

The shortlisted operators will then be invited to tender and propose their visions for Berwick Street Market based on a brief that has been developed with key stakeholders. As part of this process they will be encouraged to meet with stakeholders from the local community to help them create the vision. The traders will also be introduced to the operators to explore future potential for trading on Berwick Street Market.

Following the invitation to tender stage the council will be in a position to award the contract by January which enables the operator a mobilisation period so they can launch the market in Spring 2017.

27th October 2016